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Symbolism and Values:

Towards Improving Interreligious/Ethnic Relations

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Abstract

This paper discusses in a theoretical manner the nature, differences and similarities of symbolism (symbolizations) and values that are core elements of culture in general and of religion in particular. The main, practical point of the paper concerns the view that both symbolizations and values have socially positive and negative functionality. Their characteristics suggest that these core elements can be used in the sphere of religion for good or bad. The paper argues that religions could become collectively more relevant to modern societies by fostering communality, that is, by creating a common outlook on values and the ethical aspects of life. In so doing, religions would narrow the extent to which they are diverse, eliminate mutual distrust and develop affinities that facilitate more harmonious relations among themselves. While ameliorating the conditions that in the past were part of conflict situations, they could amplify possibilities for cooperation toward common, constructive social goals.

Key words　Symbolism, values, religious and ethnic identities

Religion: peace and conflict(1)

Seen inter-religiously, the present world still witnesses many instances of conflict where religious sentiments seem to be at odds. Tensions are not limited to widely differing religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam, Islam and Hinduism, Judaism and Islam－in some conflict situations deep-running ethnic fault lines appear to be the greater problem. As is the case of the Christian and Buddhist Churches, tensions occur within the same tradition, though less and less frequently and to a lesser degree. Certainly, in our age, many old and new religious organizations are peaceful agencies. Many

new religions profess to advocate world peace. Many individuals in religious orders, churches, organizations, and other religious groups appear to be wholeheartedly devoted to personal or social ideals, but there are notable exceptions. Some religiously oriented groups commit acts of violence and some have become notorious for their misdeeds. How to make sense of this contradictory situation in the world of religion? Could it be, as is suggested by some researchers, that the 'religious factor' somewhere contains a defective gene as it were, or, is it more plausible that particular individual leaders bear greater responsibility for religious strife?(2).

Two points from this introductory note are important in the present context. First and most important for this paper, religiously aggravated conflict is not rare in our age, despite having reached a high degree of civilization. Therefore, it must be that the reasons why such conflict occurs are not yet well known. Secondly, one may not forget that the world of religion is very diverse in terms of beliefs and practices that are not easily brought into harmony with one another. Also, social situations are never quite simple and many bones of contention are fought over in particular situations. Even if the world of religion as a whole were not substantially better than other areas of society, we would still have to be wary of popular or anti-religious stereotypes that see religion itself as a cause of war.

The goal and scope of this paper are very limited. It asks that attention be given to the socially positive and negative functionality of symbolism and values as elements of culture, which in various ways are also the paramount features of religion. Its aim is to arrive at an understanding of values and symbols that can contribute toward more harmonious relations among religious groups. This possibility suggests itself given that, within the present context, both differences and common ground in the religious sphere are better understood. The characteristics of values and symbols show how they can be used and misused socially. In the final analysis, if change for the better is possible at all, it must start in the minds of people. Let us first consider some examples of religiously muddled strife.

Belfast, Jerusalem, Ayodhya

Closest to home, the case of Northern Ireland remains on the list of conflicts where mutual understanding is improving but not yet unproblematic. Over the years, violence has been occasioned by the annual parade of the Protestant Orange Order in Belfast,

presumably due to the ban of marching through a Roman Catholic neighborhood. A parade featuring traditional community garb and music is an enjoyable event. Essentially, there should be nothing wrong with the event as it is performed annually, but its interpretation by both parties may be misguided. The Protestant side holds this march as a commemoration of their victory in a civil war with the Catholics 300 years ago. That is, they continue to evaluate highly a commemoration of an historical event. The Catholic side seems to take offense and does not want to let this procession pass through its neighborhoods. Thus, the focus of this conflict around the parade is a particular symbolization. How important is this to those concerned?

The controversy around Jerusalem as the capital of both a Jewish and a Palestinian state is much more complex due to heavy economic and political considerations, but it has a similar dimension to it. Jerusalem is seen to have considerable symbolic meaning to both Israelis and Palestinians, who have occupied the place for several centuries and therefore feel attached to it so as to want exclusive possession. To an outsider, an administrative capital without a religious aura is easily acceptable, even perhaps dual administrative facilities for politically different nations in one and the same city. Better still, the idea of Jerusalem as a holy city of the three religions that have sacred sites in the region is a dream of harmonious and peaceful relations among those religions and a showcase for others. Are symbolic entities difficult to share?

Again, a similar situation exists in Ayodhya, India, where both Muslims and Hindus contest a much smaller holy place, the site of a mosque that was destroyed in 1992 and is being rebuilt as a Hindu temple. Originally, the site in question is said to have been sacred to Rama, a Hindu god. After the conquest by Muslims in the sixteenth century, the sacredness of the place was reversed in favor of the conquerors. The site has been contested several times since the middle of the nineteenth century. Many people have been killed at various ocasions(3). Considered rationally, a temple could be built in any place that is rightfully acquired. Has a symbolic place more value than human lives?

Individual and collective identities

Values appear to have greater significance for personal identity, while symbolizations have greater weight for cultural identities. As for the first, it is easily understood that work and various organizational and/or cultural achievements are central to one's sense of self-fulfillment and self-respect. Closely related are financial gain and social

prestige that usually ensue from playing central roles in an organization. On a different level, as American politicians tend to say, people involved in religion usually evaluate highly their particular religious faith and sense of morality for their public life. Thus, work, achievements, social status, and particular instances of faith can be seen as representing values that enhance one's sense of personal well-being and identity.

In contrast, while also personally gratifying to a certain degree, things that are held in common with others within a class, a status or an age group, tend to be features of cultural identities. For instance, wearing an earring by a young adult or man may be a token of personal pride but it is also a cultural association with a sort of avant-garde in men's fashion in modern societies that presently appeals only to a small number of youths and adults. Certain things shared with a collectivity of people seem to be symbolic due to their group reference, but there is more to it as we will see below.

It is of course well-known that religious and ethnic groups hold a number of cultural elements in common. Think of particular pieces of garb, specific head coverings, turbans, veils, beards and other hair growth or its shaving in different cases. We know that many ethnic groups have their own language and that some observe proper culinary and other cultural practices. Most churches enjoy their own religious celebrations, practice their own forms of ritual, and follow their own religious customs. The older churches, Buddhist, Shinto, Roman and Orthodox Christianity stick to a traditional ritual or liturgy, using a great many symbolic objects (objects are symbolic when they refer to a reality commonly not associated with these objects). Again, the older religions have their shrines, temples, churches, and mosques built in a religiously specific architectural style. Some later founded denominations and new religions tend to have less specific religious culture or ritual. Some rely heavily on symbolism, while others do not. The latter probably derive greater meaning from other religious practices, meetings, social activities, etc.

The referred to cultural elements, pieces of clothing, instances of ritual and specific patterns of behavior constitute distinct cultural practices and customs. People feel at home with these practices if they have been exposed to them since childhood or if they have consciously chosen to identify with them at a later stage of life. However, it is important to note that, for the people involved, what we call ritual and custom, is merely a natural part of their religious or daily life. In other words, people participating as believers in religious services and other customary practices are not much aware either of ritual or custom, nor of what is symbolic in that action. Notwithstanding, symbolism does its work without the believers being aware of its existence. For instance, it mediates the

experience of an event that is being commemorated, or the initial experiences of the founders of religions, the values they preached. Emile Durkheim observed a long time ago that symbolism makes social life possible. It plays a considerable part in fashioning the subjectivity of the participants and their cultural outlook on life. Ethnic/religious communities often are ritual communities, *real* communities as compared with nation-states that sometimes are said to be *imagined* communities. It is clear that a whole array of cultural practices and distinct symbolizations may produce quite distinctive cultural identities. In as far as cultural integration and community life are desirable objectives, symbolizations held in common are quite useful cultural devices. However, many countries in the present age are multicultural societies, where seclusion is virtually impossible. Now, people cannot but be aware of their own and others' ethnic/religious identities. This awareness probably is at its strongest in confrontational relationships, when taking part in ethnic/religious strife as in the above-mentioned cases of Belfast, Jerusalem, and Ayodhya. People, who in their daily lives and occupations are husbands, fathers, barbers, railroad workers, salesmen, teachers, businessmen and so on, during their manifestations and confrontations they become just marching Protestants, protesting Catholics, fighting Israelis, Palestinians, Hindus and Muslims. In continual confrontation, personal and cultural identities fall into disaccord, and identities become one-dimensional. In this case, it is quite conceivable that the well-being of the community is evaluated as higher in rank than the individual's life, so that killing opponents and occasionally sacrificing one's personal life are implicitly legitimated or quasi self-evident to particular persons in these groups.

In severe conflict situations, identities so to speak are locked in conflict. Possibly complicated through other interests, great significance is attributed to the symbolizations of the in-group. Those of the out-group are depreciated. In other words, the symbolic elements that fashion the subjectivity of the in-group are highly treasured by that group, while those of the out-group are seen as mere markers of difference and signs of segregation. Excessively adhered to values and symbolizations become sources of dislike, distrust, and contempt. In extreme cases, they are the red cloth that excites violence. Symbols become objects of hatred; the foe's flag is burnt, effigies are hanged. When a confrontation spins out of control, blood flows.

The thesis I am suggesting concerning the positive and negative functionality of symbolism and values is as follows. First, symbolizations, ritual, and other symbolic behaviors are very important as means of formation of a community and a particular relig-

ious experience. Symbolizations therefore are important cultural elements and worthy of mutual respect. This is the positive side. Second, the reverse and negative side is that symbolizations can be reinforced as things of great value, resulting in 'unhealthy' invigoration of personal and collective identities. Third, values may function in unhealthy ways when they are imposed as norms, or on the contrary, when all values are professed to be totally relative in nature. Fourth, values function personally and socially in a positive way, as sources of inspiration. The problem on hand is that symbolism and valuation can be conflated. In the following sections we focus on the nature of these cultural elements, beginning with a short review of the subject in sociological literature.

The Study of Values and Symbols

Since Parsons pays much attention to the non-measurable matter of motivations and cultural orientations, values and symbolism, one cannot pass him by in discussing this subject. Let us briefly summarize his view. The two basic premises of his action theory are as follows. Firstly, social action serves to gratify need-dispositions and avoid deprivation. Secondly, people engage in social action in specific ways, through three modes of orientation: cognitive, cathectic, and evaluative modes. These modes are actualized, based on various forms of knowledge (scientific and existential), value orientations, and expressive symbolism. Very generally, action is oriented by means of the culture.

To repeat, the two central, analytical dimensions of culture, crucial in the present context, are value orientations and expressive symbolism. According to Parsons, the first is internal to actors and the second external. *Value orientations* consist of patterns of evaluation that are internalized in and through the socialization process, in which identification with significant others is a basic point. Patterns of evaluation are said to have 'a special and critical relation to the structure of social systems' (Parsons, 1961: 983), or even with more emphasis, 'Values occupy a very central place in the area of interpenetration of social and cultural systems. This component of culture is truly most directly constitutive of the social system itself' (Parsons, 1961: 992). Actually, value orientations are mentioned in almost every chapter of *The Social System*. In turn, *expressive symbolism* is actualized in patterns of orientations to objects (social, physical, and cultural objects) that represent communication of affect. The latter patterns constitute the broader cultural context of action.

Parsons' view is complex. He is primarily concerned with all analytical dimensions of

social action rather than with specific instances of empirical action. Thus, he discusses in the same context the three types of orientation to action: the *expressive* orientation of action, which is characteristic of action in general as fulfillment of a need-disposition through acting as such (independent of goal-attainment); the *instrumental* orientation is characteristic of economic activity; the *moral* orientation of action concerns integration both *within* the instrumental and expressive complexes respectively and *between* them. Highly complicated also is Parsons' typology of the various components of value-orientation in which he cross-tabulates his four pairs of pattern variables: universalism-particularism; ascription-achievement (these yield his four major social value-orientations); diffuseness-specificity; neutrality-affectivity; (cross-tabulated with the basic types, these yield two tables of sixteen types of components of social roles and personal attitudes. (Parsons, 1951: 68−112).

Parsons himself appears not to have been totally happy with his theoretical edifice. He mentioned that 'It has been remarked several times above that we are not in a position to develop a complete dynamic theory in the action field and that, therefore, the systematization of theory in the present state of knowledge must be in "structural-functional" terms' (Parsons, 1951: 19). Also, 'The field of expressive symbolism, in a theoretical sense, is one of the least developed parts of the theory of action' (Parsons, 1951: 384).

Certainly, Parsons has the merit of discussing both value-orientation patterns and systems of symbolism as central features of culture, while many others focus either on values or on symbols, and thus tend to reify the subject matter(4). This appears to be the case in the following monographic studies, from which I will summarize or cite definitions of values.

Milton Rocheach (1983) defines a value as an enduring belief concerning the desirability of a certain state of social existence or specific modes of behavior. He distinguishes two kinds: *terminal values* (idealized end-states of existence, such as world peace and personal peace of mind), and *instrumental values* (idealized modes of behavior). He claims that there are about one and a half dozen terminal values and several dozen instrumental values that can be seen as a means to realize the former. It is a characteristic of values that they are not necessarily integrated into a logical whole. They may be in competition with one another. In everyday life, values are used with extraordinary versatility. Values serve several functions: as motivations for and as standards of behavior (they are said to be useful for guidance and evaluation of behavior in seven different

ways). As for behavioral motivation in general, they fulfill these functions as means to end-states, and, in particular, by enhancing self-esteem, by their adaptive character, by their use in ego-defense, and by the appropriation of meaning (Rocheach, 1983: 5−17). Seen sociologically, values can be considered to be dependent variables; seen psychologically, one can treat them as independent variables (Rocheach, 1983: 326).

In a study by Feliks Gross (1985) values, goals, and norms are discussed as closely related phenomena. Gross defines the nature of values and presents a list of their functions as follows:

> Values are generalized cultural data that are either measures or guides of our behavior or goals. They form a central theme and integrate the entire idea system. However, values are not separate blocks, but are a consequence and an articulation of an idea system or doctrine. They form a shared *symbolic* system. . . . Social values exercise three major functions: 1) They integrate society by means of various forms of social control, legitimacy, and *symbolism*; 2) they supply the sense of direction and pattern of conduct; 3) they are a motivating force and mobilize individual and social action (Gross 1985: 72, italics added).

Still another but similar view is held by Edward Shils (1988). According to Shils, a value may be the object of an act of evaluation or striving. Values, as elements of motivation, are components of an action under the form of *symbolic* configurations. Shils observes: 'The *symbolic* configuration to which the term value refers has an objective existence－not a physical or neuro-physical existence. It has the same objectivity as a proposition of logic or mathematics.' (Shils, 1988: 48; italics added). Thus, values are said to be objects of mental actions or standards for judging situations. Again, according to Shils, there are primary and secondary values, fundamental and derivative ones, which are not necessarily harmonious or logically ordered. As symbolic configurations, they may be in conflict with one another. But because values are vague, conflicts of values are bearable. In this respect, it may be better to leave them vague, because 'Extreme clarity in the formulation of values can be dangerous to society' (Shils, 1988: 54). At any rate, clarification of values is not likely to have practical benefits in making action more effective. If it does, it is likely to increase conflict in that other values may be suppressed.

The foregoing studies of values show a similar reifying tendency, which is apparent in the concern for classification of functions as if they were isolated occurrences. Though

not stated explicitly, values are mostly treated as factors, which explain behavior, self and society: motivation or guides, standards or measures of behavior, enhancement of self-esteem and social integration. Another common, questionable point of these studies is that values are conceptualized as part and parcel of a symbol system, wherein values appear to be subordinated to symbols. The great variety of functions and especially the conflation of values and symbolizations preclude clarity concerning the basics of valuation and symbolism.

Kenneth Boulding (1969) suggests a less reifying approach in his study of values and technology. He finds that the development of technology in any society is closely related with what is valued, because both values (preference functions) and technology (a production function) are created and transmitted by a common learning process. In focusing on a relationship, Boulding is more concerned with the process of valuation than with particular values as factors of causal explanation. This suggests a crucial methodological difference. What must be understood first are the mechanisms of symbolism and valuation, not objectivated symbols and values.

Conflation of symbolism and valuation

Parsons' analysis of symbolism and value-orientation is problematic. He merely observed their being external and internal elements of culture respectively, which, in general, communicate affect and represent evaluation respectively. He probably concluded that symbolism imparted affect because he saw it as the expressive orientation toward fulfillment of needs in general in contrast to the instrumental orientation and goal-attainment. He did not mention any other properties, but he argues that expressive symbolism and values are *intrinsically* related(5). A fundamental feature of expressive symbolizations in his view is their being shared in collectivities and their being *bound up with common values.* This is clear, Parsons maintains, from the three major types of expressive symbolisms: 1) uniformity of life style within collectivities, which does not directly affect bounds of solidarity; 2) modes of expressive, collective sentiments that are contained in social customs; and 3) modes of evaluative or moral collective sentiments, within which the attitude of moral respect for the collectivity is predominant (Parsons, 1951: 394−398).

Particularly problematic in Parsons' analysis is his view of expressive symbolism, which he sees as characterized by affect, and the prototype of which is the 'symbolic act.'

According to Parsons, a symbolic act acquires both gratificatory and symbolic significance. There is gratificatory significance because act-units in human relations bear on the balance between gratification and deprivation. There is symbolic significance because those acts are expressions of the attitudes of the actors. Further, symbolic meaning tends to be extended to everything that is closely related to the action: the bodies of the actors, what they wear, their style of acting, the differentiated roles of the actors, and in some cases even the place of the acting, for instance, buildings. The extension of symbolism occurs through association with the action. Therefore, the context of expressive activity is called 'a complex of symbolic association' (Parsons, 1961: 398).

One need not doubt that symbolism and value-orientation, as dimensions of action, are interrelated and function in combination, but this does not imply that these phenomena do not have individual properties and specific functionality. As developed below, a very different view emerges by assuming that symbolization and valuation are distinct functions of the human mind(6). Meaning is created through both faculties, and, therefore, they are intrinsically related *empirically*. However, the particularity of valuation and values is that they represent *evaluation* of meaning, while that of symbolization basically is creation of new meaning. In this view, I argue that language is the prototype of symbolism, not symbolic acts. How do symbolization and valuation function in relation to each other?

Language and Symbolism

Symbolism is a heavy-weight topic in the study of culture (Duncan, 1968; Geertz, 1973; Wagner, 1986). The following is an interesting observation. '[A] single phenomenon or principle *constitutes* human culture and cultural capability. I have called this phenomenon "trope" for its most familiar manifestation as the perception of meaning within cultural reference points' (Wagner 1986: 126). This anthropologist discusses trope, or metaphor, as the main source from which culture springs and meaning is elicited. The word trope derives from the Greek verb 'to turn,' suggesting change of meaning. The same holds for the term 'metaphor,' and, in my view, for all symbolism that is effected through association and substitution. In other words, I see association and substitution as master keys of symbolism, as mechanisms through which new meaning is created or extended. This mechanism as such is simple but culture, as the totality of a myriad of symbolizations contained in language, a great part of human behavior, and many systems of

knowledge and thought, is very complex indeed.

How are association and substitution basic to symbolism? Let us return to our earlier examples of cultural symbolizations. A head scarf is a piece of cloth that in Islam has acquired a particular social, religious meaning for women, and that is religiously sanctioned by this religion but not by other cultures. A little earring, worn as a kind of insignia to a modern male individual, represents an extension of meaning from an object belonging to female culture, now in part transferred to male culture. Thus our headscarf and earring show a particular association with man and womanhood. Again, in the case of the lotus flower, it is also association that transforms it into the cherished symbol of enlightenment in Buddhism through the apprehension of beauty in both cases. Other ways of association are to be noticed in the focal symbols of Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam: the cross, the wheel (of the Law), and the crescent. The Christian cross and the Buddhist war-chariot wheel in particular are powerful metaphors, because common-sense perception is left far behind and symbolic, spiritual meaning is created and represented.

In all the above examples, it is neither a form of action nor sharing or group reference that bring about symbolism itself. It is a mind process that engenders special meaning through 'trope' as mentioned by Wagner: the turning around of things, activating a new perception, and eliciting new meaning that transcends common sense perception. But it is sharing that invigorates symbolism and makes it work.

Generally speaking, language is a system of representation, substitution, and association, and can therefore be seen as the prototype of symbolism. All words are symbolic in a broad sense. Things, actions, relationships, functions, and whatever, are represented by sounds and written characters. In most cases, there is no intrinsic relationship between those sounds/characters and the things, actions, etc., that are represented in that way. We say, language is a matter of convention, but it is more important to note that speech and language have been invented. It is very difficult to trace empirically their origin, but we can give some suggestive examples.

Plato gives numerous examples in *Cratylus.* In these dialogues, Socrates discusses the meaning of names. Apart from what he wants to demonstrate, he observes that names, which are rightly given (when an intrinsic relationship is expressed), are the likenesses or images of the things they name. Thus, according to Socrates' etymology, the words Uranos and Gaia (heaven and earth) derive from the Greek for 'looking upwards' and 'giving birth' respectively. The proper name Zeus derives from the verb 'to live' (zaoh), meaning, according to Socrates, that Zeus is the God through whom all creatures

have life. The name Agamemnon, one of the Greek heroes, means 'great endurance;' Hector, as a 'holder of possessions,' means 'king,' Orestes 'man of the mountains,' and so on. In this formation of names, proper nouns derive from substantive verbs or nouns. A general meaning is particularized in a person. This is both association and substitution. However, awareness of this transformation gets lost over time. Even Socrates' contemporaries were no longer aware of this etymology.

Another interesting association is the attribution of gender to nouns in the older Indo-European languages. Why should natural, inanimate phenomena like the sun, the moon, stars, night and day, trees and mountains have gender? Those phenomena originally may have been thought of as animate things or gods even. Whatever applies, since there is no common-sense relationship between, e.g., night and womanhood, female gender must have been assigned to this word in Indo-European languages through association with human gender. So it goes with all the nouns in the related languages.

More common examples are the following. As we know, symbolism is effected in words that express a physical property like depth, height, broadness, narrowness, when used to express the non-physical properties of thought and meaning. Similarly, colors express symbolic meaning through association with social status in some societies and with feelings in others. In several religions, specific colors express the mood of specific celebrations as well as gradation of the hierarchy in their ranks.

To repeat, my main interest in this context concerns the fundamental characteristics of symbolism. The above examples are intended to show that symbolism comes about through association or substitution and that it causes transformation of meaning in the case of metaphors. One crucial point is that symbolism starts in the mind. Fundamentally, therefore, *symbolizations are cognitive devices* that, similar to the stock of words of a language, exist in great variety. As for language itself, the primary social function of symbolizations is expression and communication of meaning, not affect as Parsons maintains. The great variety in the domain of symbolization is due to the great range of thought that roams in every direction. It is also conditioned by the great variety in the physical world as the object of thought. There are numerous possibilities for creating symbolizations and new symbolic meanings.

Valuation and values(7)

In contrast to symbolizations that are primarily cognitive devices, I argue that val-

ues, while imparting also cognition, are primarily evaluations of meaning that are rooted in affect. This appears to be the case, because gratification informs valuation. That gratification is the core of valuation may appear as a paraphrasing of Parsons' starting point of his theory: action is engaged in as gratification of need-dispositions. However, there is quite a difference. It suggests that value is inherent in action itself, as also Shils' maintains. Adopting that proposition implies that, by acting and experimenting, people find out what is useful or effective for realizing goals and what is satisfying in terms of experience. A crucial point here is that value is inherent in an act. It is its reward. What is experienced as gratifying tends to be repeated and to become a habit. In consequence, the range of individual and collective valuation tends to narrow down to particular preferences. Very generally, the range of valuation corresponds to the range of generically distinct actions.

The assumption that gratification is the core of valuation and that value is an aspect of an act has several significant implications. It suggests, firstly, that valuation, as originating practically within action, acquires a different cognitive status as compared to symbolization that germinates in thinking. In other words, like cognition and evaluation, symbolization and valuation are distinct categories of perception. Secondly, if gratification is the core of valuation, it follows that value is not a moral concept. Anything may be felt to be gratifying to an individual. Thus either being honest or dishonest, being loyal or deceitful, being thrifty or lazy, doing good or ill can be gratifying for a particular individual. Thirdly, if gratification is the core of valuation, it appears that the tone of valuation is determined not through rationality but rather through feeling. Our idea of rationality suggests continuity or accumulation. The various forms of rationality can be seen as different degrees of the same. In contrast, feelings suggest discontinuity. In other words, the various emotions appear to be of a distinct nature. This might be the reason why Max Scheler maintains that values belong to different spheres, and why others (Rocheah, 1983; Shils, 1988) observe that our various values are not harmonious. Further, if not rationality but emotion is basic to evaluation, it seems to follow that the range of evaluation corresponds both to the range of distinct action (as already mentioned above) *and* to the range of our feelings, a proposition that I hope to discuss in a follow-up.

Particularly important in the above is that morality and rationality are not necessarily given in individual action. This can also be inferred from the condition of human nature as an emergent existence, which initially is non-socialized and never will be totally socialized. Ways of thinking and behaving that benefit society tend to become recognized

and legitimated by collectivities and thus become established as patterns of behavior and culture. Thus the properties of morality and rationality are most relevant at the collective level. They are acquired through reflection and social negotiation.

The chemistry of everyday life

To everyday consciousness, symbolization and valuation are not given as distinct human faculties. Like thinking and acting, they do not function independently of each other. Notwithstanding, again like thinking and acting, these faculies are better understood as different phenomena that have distinct properties and display divergent functioning. Analogically, one could speak of a river as an image of socio-cultural life, alluding to its fluid and ever-changing state, but the substance of a river is simply water that, in its molecular form, is rightly described as H_2O, a fusion of hydrogen and oxygen gases. Since physical substances and their component elements have totally different properties, one cannot compare them with the softer blends of cultural elements. The latter do not reveal a fixed interdependency as in the case of the relations among the elemental substances in nature, but this should not mean that regularities in relationships among such core dimensions of culture are totally absent. They cannot function randomly. I argue that the mechanisms of symbolization and valuation show a definite, universal logic. Hypothetically, I see them as constituting twin mechanisms, the internal human agencies that produce culture in the broadest sense of the term and that, in isolation, can be described as follows.

In essence, symbolization is a mechanism for the construction, expression, and fixation or closure of meaning. Symbolizations can be characterized as 'partial modes of being' and 'images of behavior,' that indeed materialize as images, but also as symbolic objects, ritual, and other symbolic behavior. They constitute the observable, structural core elements of culture that play a primary role in the formation of cultural identities. The core feature of symbolizations is cognition, and their main function serves communication. Due to this function, and the definite, *fixed* meaning they convey, symbolizations are highly useful in education as means for transmitting knowledge and improving understanding. As for their fixation of meaning, they resemble the grammatical past perfect tense of the passive voice. Symbolizations show that 'something has been done; something has been revealed.' People *embody* and *live* their symbolizations *collectively* in traditional societies (e.g., wearing veils, sporting a particular style of clothing, growing

beards, and participating in ritual) and more *individually* in modern societies and its sub-cultures (earrings, shaven heads, fashion styles, etc.). The attraction of symbolic elements in traditional and modern settings derives mainly from sharing and from newness respectively.

As cognitive devices, similar to all knowledge, symbolizations are apt to develop and multiply. Obvious examples are the always-changing items of modern fashion, goods and gadgets that represent new shades of meaning and symbolism, but so is the highly differentiated state of religion, which is a result of much experimenting with the production of symbolic meanings throughout the ages. Like fashionable goods, any symbolization seems as valid as any other. In other words, symbolizations seem to involve a similar logic, serve a similar purpose, and therefore must be *functionally equivalent.*

In contrast, the mechanism of valuation basically is evaluation of meaning that is realized in acting. As such, valuation is a mechanism central to the formation of self and social institutions. Values, as elements of culture, are abstractions derived from individual and collective behavior. They are objectivated as ideas that become particular categories of thought, that is, they become predominantly conceptual core elements of culture (in contrast to symbolizations that can be seen as structural core elements). As manifestations of evaluation, values involve hierarchy (Dumont, 1983). If hierarchy is an inherent attribute of values, any particular value cannot be the equivalent of any other. As a manifestation of gratification and feeling, valuation also implies a substantial difference that is objectivated in the various categories of values that therefore are *substantially different.* Seen concretely, this seems evident when one compares actions engaged in for material/economic gain, for social/political prestige and power, or for spiritual/religious/moral benefits. However, due to substantial differences among values, one also understands that values are complementary. In plain language, many things and actions are useful, interesting, and therefore desirable. Consequently, due to the feature of priority depending on a particular situation, the hierarchy aspect or the priority of values cannot but be relative in nature.

Further, values have an open horizon. In grammatical language, valuation resembles the present imperfect of the progressive tense. 'I am doing something; something is gratifying to me, and beneficial to others.' Values then are useful to education, not for transmitting or improving established knowledge but for providing ideas and inspiring people. In aspiring to, and following up on these ideas/ideals, people work on their identities and what they can become.

In this conception, one may see how symbolizations and values overlap as *images/modes* and *ideas* of behavior and being. Symbolizations resemble images that represent themselves as facts to which one is present. Adopting symbolizations is like wearing clothes. Newness is their great attraction in modern societies. Values in contrast are intangible and represent themselves as visions of what can be realized. People can be said to *live* values, too, but they do not easily incarnate values. In everyday life, people look for what is of value in various ways and in various circumstances. In the best of cases, they enjoy the simple pleasures of life, enjoy being honest, hard working, having good human relations, love nature, and so on, but all this is in the present imperfect tense. People in modern societies have different priorities at different times. Also, they repeat what is useful, meaningful, gratifying in an individualized manner but, at the same time, they are under the influence of socio-cultural climate, particularly of consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991; Ciochetto, 2004; Mohan, 2004). One would think that the quality of life is all that matters but this is a very precarious assumption in the present age.

Theoretically again, both symbolizations and valuations are cognitive in nature. Both involve concepts, show a particular content, and are used for communicating meaning but, like images and ideas, they are not interchangeable. They function differently.

Distinct functionality: use and misuse

Different implements serve different purposes. Symbolizations and values, which are part of the same reality, have divergent properties and therefore can be used in various ways. In other words, in socio-cultural life, they can be used, for better or worse, to bolster the culture and behavior they are part of.

Symbolizations (symbolic objects, social and religious ritual), as modes/images of behavior and being and as observable cultural elements, show a high degree of objectivation that may function as constraint. Due to these properties, symbolizations are *par excellence* means of social integration[8] and possibly of manipulation. Within a particular culture, symbolizations are easily understood and accepted. However, as primarily cognitive elements, symbolizations are apt to differentiate in the same manner as knowledge. These two characteristics, a high degree of objectivation and differentiation, imply opposing tendencies. Symbolizations can be reinforced or made normative based on their constraint and their usefulness as means of communication and domination, but due to their tendency of differentiation and lack of hierarchy, imposing symbolizations appears to be

against their nature, particularly so in modern, differentiated settings. Symbolizations may cause suspicion, especially to outsiders of a culture, because of their constraining force, while their tendency toward differentiation may diminish that attitude. Thus, the possibility of differentiation of symbolizations seems to counteract their constraint. Discarding them in certain cases is of no great consequence on the same account. That some religions rely heavily on symbolism while other do not, illustrates its relative nature in contrast to values that are not discarded without serious consequences.

In contrast, valuation shows a high degree of subjectivation for several reasons. For a start, value is an aspect of an act that becomes strongly internalized the more a specific act is repeated. Specific valuations then become elements of personal identity, which, however, do not ascertain the integration of identity, because contradictory values may be internalized. Values, which are internalized and become elements of individual identity, are not easily discarded. However, values as ideas and conceptual elements of culture have a low degree of constraint in contrast to symbolizations. As conceptual elements, and due to their property of hierarchy as well as their limited possibility of differentiation (they are relatively few in number), values are apt to be conceived as highly normative and are easily imposed, as religious organizations tend to do[(9)]. However, because of the property of relative hierarchy and complementary nature of values, no one value in particular should be propagated as the highest in rank. Absolutizing specific values could create an unacceptable bias. Individual autonomy must be guaranteed. Values, due to their open horizon, serve best as human ideals and inspiration. As such, they are durable and not easily exhausted. In turn, values may be resented because of their property of hierarchy and their substantial differences that derive from a different type of affect. If all these characteristics hold true, one understands that values too may function to fuel conflict.

Towards a better understanding of interreligious/ethnic relations

Particular symbolizations are important for ethic/religious life. Culture in all its diversity, like knowledge in all its diversity, is the treasure house of the world. The sharing of a territory, a language, particular customs, religious faith, social ritual, the wearing of particular clothes and so on, are important factors for collective identity. Thus, the significance of symbolizations within a culture is beyond doubt. Regretfully, it is often overlooked that cultural differences are very meaningful overall. One can learn from dif-

ferent cultures, because they express differently the various meanings of life. It is in this sense that diversity may occasion respect. Without subscribing to a foreign culture, one can wonder about its particularities and appreciate the inventions of the human mind. However, symbolizations, that are basically cognitive in nature, may be contaminated by mistakenly attributing to them the status of value as such—even attributing higher meaning to symbolizations than to life itself—by loading them with affect and high-level hierarchy, resulting in feelings of superiority over other groups. This constitutes, empirically and theoretically, conflation of symbolization and valuation. It leads to excessive particularism. Symbolizations are easily manipulated. Culturally 'manipulated,' people become highly aware of external differences and may develop a considerable degree of antagonism toward other groups. Symbolizations, that are cognitive in nature, are shareable in principle but need not be shared.

The importance of values is more widely recognized. Neither individuals nor collectivities can do without making decisions about what is important in various situations. Most cultures treasure a positive evaluation of human relations, the family, devotion to work, respect for authority, love for nature, reverence of life itself as well as the simple pleasures of life. It is in the domain of values, which, as a whole, is much narrower than the domain of symbolism, that one can look for universalizing tendencies and a sense of unity of culture, even a world culture. The major pitfalls on the road to a world culture seen in the present context are attempts at imposing a set of values and declaring that all values are of equal significance. As for putting all values on a par, this would lead to excessive particularism and arbitrariness. This would make 'black holes' of cultures from which no sense of commonality can grow. Due to the property of hierarchy and the distinct feelings to which values correspond, values cannot be equivalent. Imposing values represents pseudo universality and is even more problematic. Values that are ideas open to the future, which are substantially different and show shifting priority, are not fit to being imposed. Further, to be useful to societies and individuals, values need not be narrowly defined. The just mentioned values of work, love for people and nature, reverence of authority etc., can be realized in various ways and need not and should not lead to uniformity.

Paradoxically, a beneficial effect of becoming aware of common ground concerning values is that mutual differences, deriving from the adoption of different symbolizations, may become more positive. Without that recognition, particularistic symbolizations tend to be divisive and oppressive even. In opting for a common outlook on values and adher-

ing to a common ethical view of life, every culture and religion may be encouraged to maintain its own ritual community and symbolic universe. In recognizing a common humanity, these symbolic elements cease to be marks of difference and signs segregation, and the extent to which cultures and religions are diverse is considerably narrowed. This awareness and adoption of similar positions to the above should ease relations among religious and ethnic groups to an extent that is presently unimaginable.

Notes

(1) Parts of this paper were presented at the midterm conference of Futures Research of the International Sociological Association, 24−26 September, 2004, at Bukkyo University, Kyoto, and the XIXth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), 24−30 March, 2005, Tokyo. The general theme of the latter was, as in this first heading of this paper, 'Religion: Conflict and Peace'.

(2) Sociologically, we have to be careful not to set apart too strictly agency versus the structural, socio-religious factors. This is one of the pitfalls of theoretical analysis. Cf., Archer, 2000.

(3) See related stories in TIME Magazine December 21, 1992 and July 29, 2002.

(4) For example, in anthropology and related literature the central concern is either values (Kluckhohn, 1962: 73; Kroeber, 1963: 102; Sugiyama-Lebra, 1976) or symbols (Duncan, 1968; Geertz, 1973, Wagner, 1986). Studied in isolation bias in favor of one dimension is apt to increase. A recent study by Hatas, 2002, argues for a synthesis in sociology focusing on symbolism.

(5) Consider the following short quotes from Parsons, which in my view show the conflation of values and symbolism or the subordination of the former to the latter. 'In the basic scheme of action, symbolization is clearly involved in cognitive orientation and in *the concept of evaluation*' (Parsons, 1951: 10). 'An element of *a shared symbolic system* which serves as a criterion or standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open in a situation may be called *a value*' (Parsons, 1951: 12; emphasis added).

(6) The central terms in this paper are used as follows. *Value* in the singular refers to what is valuable in various concrete ways. As an abstraction, value is seen as one aspect of an act. *Values* are linguistically objectivated ideas about what is of value. *Valuation* refers to the process of valuing, and *valuations* indicate mainly individual values. *Symbolizations* are the concrete representations that are arrived at through the process of *symbolization* in verbal from, in the symbolic use of things in everyday life, and in standardized action (ritual). *Symbolizations* as a term is preferred over the more common term *symbols* that refers primarily to symbolic objects. The latter is only one category of symbolizations. *Symbolism* refers the whole matter of symbolization.

Values as cultural core elements are discussed in Bachika, 1993; 1999; 2002 a; 2002 b, while the process of symbolization is more fully discussed in Bachika, 2003.

(7) Several well-known authors of social science have substantially contributed to the discussion of morality and ethics: cf. Bauman, 1993; and Joas, 2000; Apel (2000). Strydom, 2000: 133−136, cites many others. Wil Arts, Hagenaars & Halman (eds) 2003 is the sixth volume in the series of empirical studies that have been conducted by scholars associated with the European

Values Studies (EVS), which was initiated by Jan Kerkhofs (University of Leuven) and Ruud de Moor (Tilburg University) in the late 1970s. The negative side of morality and ethics is discussed e.g. in Wilkinson, 2005.

(8) In his recent writing, Bourdieu seems to have broadened the meaning of 'symbolic capital.' In his view, it refers to a 'synthesis' adopted from various, separate, and even opposing theoretical traditions in the social sciences, wherein 'symbolic schemata' are interpreted either as 'the instruments of construction of the world of objects,' and as 'instruments of communication,' or as 'economic and political instruments of power' reducing issues of power and politics to issues of meaning. (Bourdieu, 1993: 166; 1999: 336). From this it seems to follow for Bourdieu as for many authors in earlier social science, that 'the symbolic' is representative of culture in general. But it seems also evident that the symbolic easily becomes a means of manipulation.

(9) The Aum new religious cult in Japan is an example of disastrous imposition of an absolute value system leading to various murders and the use of lethal sarin gas in a Tokyo metro station in 1995.

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